

FOOTBALL.

LUTON TOWN AT READING.

THE "REDS" WIN GLORIOUSLY.

STORY OF A PENALTY KICK.

Saturday last saw the Luton "reds" at Reading, the game being an important fixture in the Southern League contest. The encounter had been looked forward to with considerable interest hereabouts, for it was anticipated that the struggle would be a keen one, while not a few expected to hear that the Reading team had obtained the victory on their own ground. Accordingly the tidings that the Lutonians had secured a brilliant win by three goals to a blank created intense enthusiasm in Luton, the supporters evincing their satisfaction in the usual time-honoured fashion. Not without reason was it that some doubts existed as to the ability of the "reds" to capture points, for though the homesters had defeated Reading by seven to two earlier in the season it was remembered that the strengthening process had been steadily proceeding at the Berkshire town. Some who were present when the teams met at Reading last season remembered the close contest that took place, the visitors eventually holding their own by the margin of a single goal. Still, bearing in mind the "class" element in the side, students of football as a rule quite expected the Lutonians to repeat their performance.

The team commenced the journey into Berks. by the 9.5 express, a saloon being placed at their disposal by the Midland Company, a courtesy which was copied by the Great Western authorities. Biscuit town was reached before mid-day, and the interval before the commencement of operations was filled up by the discussion of the indispensable meal and a stroll through some of the fine streets which the Berkshire centre can boast of possessing. Regarding that same meal the footballers have a story to tell; but it is one that will keep. The match took place on the Caversham ground, and when the time fixed had arrived a large crowd was found to have assembled, the wires being thickly lined and the grand-stand filled. The company included several followers of the team from Luton, and it was refreshing to hear that the "reds" are held in high regard at Reading. It was ascertained that Gallacher, who had sustained an injury on Wednesday, would not play, his place at outside right being filled by Birch, while Watkins took the berth at right half.

The referee (Mr. C. D. Crisp, of Ryde) took the following sides under his care at just about the advertised time:—

Reading: Goal, Cannon; backs, Bach (captain) and Justins; half-backs, White, Evans and Knight; forwards, Gray and Marshall (right wing), Reid (centre), Cunningham and Wheeler (left wing).

Luton: Goal, Russell; backs, McCartney and McEwen; half-backs, Watkins, Stewart, and Docherty (captain); forwards, Birch and Coupar (right wing), Galbraith (centre), Parkinson and Ekins (left wing).

Linesmen: Messrs. J. George (Reading) and E. Walsh (Luton).

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There was a very high wind sweeping down the ground when the game started and Luton necessarily elected to take advantage of this when they won the toss. For a short time after the kick-off play was confined to the neighbourhood of the centre line, and Luton were first to go away. When in a good position Galbraith spoiled his chance by handling the ball. Next Marshall broke away and sent over the line, while Justin in the next minute or so cleared well when pressed. The ball went out on the Luton left several times in irritating fashion; it should be said, though, that this was not altogether the fault of the players, for the wind was blowing very hard. Watkins made a miss which looked likely to bring danger to his side, and it was only by the exercise of considerable dash that McCartney was enabled to come to the rescue. Coupar was fouled by Cunningham, and Mr. Crisp next signified his opinion that Ekins was off-side when quite near the goal. Reid got away neatly and sent through at a great pace, only to receive the referee's dictum that he had broken the off-side law; indeed, the whistle had sounded ere the ball went between the posts. Cannon was called upon to negotiate a hot one from the foot of Watkins, and he rose to the occasion well, his clearance being admirable. Thereafter "Gally," who was getting "chipped" consumedly by the crowd, failed to beat the custodian when not a great distance from the uprights, and immediately after the same player was adjudged to have handled the ball. Knight was punished for fouling the visitors' centre man, and the free-kick led to a long-continued assault on the home fortress, the ball bobbing about in front of Cannon repeatedly. The "reds" were for the time being unable to defeat the ex-soldier, however, and eventually a goal-kick to Reading had the result of raising the siege. In a minute or two Reid was observed to work his way through well and he gave the opposition defence some hot work, the Luton backs ultimately clearing in good style. Following hands against the home contingent Parkinson sent over from a pass by Ekins. It should be interpolated here that the inside left man was passing vastly better than usual, Ekins being presented with several opportunities of displaying to advantage. To resume, let it be said that after Watkins had steered over the line Galbraith got through and kicked far above the bar. Evans was hereabouts observed to kick "Gally," this being the second time in the game that he sinned similarly. Cunningham put in some useful work which enabled him to get within range; but, alas for the hopes of the home supporters, he shot ludicrously wide of the mark. Parkinson did not exactly follow suit, for he tested Cannon with a beauty, the custodian saving grandly. The corner which was presented to the "reds" was not profitable, a goal-kick being the outcome of a sturdy struggle. Birch forced Bach to concede a corner, this being the only noteworthy thing that the outside right man had yet done. The opportunity of scoring was not accepted, though, the ball being sent behind the net from the corner-flag. Reading were off-side soon after, and then Russell saved magnificently twice in a brief space, the homesters attacking strongly. The spectators were not slow to applaud; indeed, at no period of the game were they anything but lavish with their expressions of appreciation or otherwise. Cannon received an especially hearty round of applause when he saved capitally from Parkinson, while Coupar a little later tested the keeper. The Luton left wingers, working well in concert, gave the defence plenty to do, Ekins getting in some good centres. The home lot advanced in force; but they did nothing particularly brilliant when in the Luton confines and were soon forced back over the line. A shot from Birch's toe was well disposed of, and just after the Reading boys had a try at Russell's charge—a fruitless one, however. A couple of corners accrued to the "reds" in a brief space, yet nothing came of them, Ekins sending behind from the second. Russell once more cleared capably, a performance which was copied by his *vis-a-vis*, Parkinson giving Cannon a beauty to deal with. The ground was now being swept by a heavy rain-storm, and as time went on it was noticed that the ball as well as the turf became very slippery. When Watkins had been pulled up for hands Parkinson succeeded in lowering Cannon's colours for the first time. The success was received with some coolness, and the spectators were justified in feeling disappointed, for the score was distinctly lucky. The shot was fast and well directed; but it should have been easily dealt with by Cannon, who for some inscrutable reason did not attempt to play the ball. To make amends in some degree the keeper saved splendidly from Galbraith, and later on Luton forced a corner. This proved resultless, as did a grand effort by Gray, Russell saving marvellously. Ekins sent wide twice in succession from passes by Birch, and Watkins essayed a long one without success. Gray had another shy at goal without the desired effect, the ball striking the side of the net. At the interval the scores were:

LUTON, ONE; READING, NONE.

In the second half the Reading representatives had the wind in their favour, and this was now no mean advantage, for it was blowing harder than ever. The sun, too, shone fiercely in the visitors' faces for a time. Soon after the re-start, the crowd broke down the wire on the side opposite to the grand-stand, and though on this occasion they were sent back they repeatedly encroached later on. Indeed, the nuisance became so pronounced that the operations had to be stopped more than once. Early in the second moiety the "reds" went down in style and Ekins dispatched a beauty at Cannon, though unfortunately it was somewhat wide. The "biscuit boys" subsequently attacked in force and some rough and tumble play took place in the vicinity of the "reds'" citadel, the backs eventually succeeding in checking further advance. The homesters were evidently determined to get through if possible, for in a short time they were again found attacking hotly, the final effort being laughably wild. McEwen presented his foemen with a corner, this being the first in the game to be secured by the home eleven. This was badly placed, and the ball passed into possession of the Luton forwards, who did not part with it until Parkinson had got into a position to take a snap-shot, Ekins passing well to him. As much bad luck as ever was experienced by the strangers, the leather going over the Reading line. Parkinson, who continued to do well, had another try when right in front of the uprights, though with no better result. Gray once more put himself in evidence, and he was deservedly cheered for a well-directed shot which gave Russell a good deal of trouble. Galbraith, receiving from Parkinson, forced Cannon to tip the ball over the cross-bar, the resultant corner not being improved upon. Ekins took the kick remarkably well, and Cannon once more put himself in evidence. Birch headed on the wrong side of the post when close in, and Coupar delayed the onward march of his comrades by fouling an opponent, Russell being provided with some work in consequence. Following several throws-in on the Luton right Marshall secured and had a good try to beat Russell—though not quite good enough. The home backs behaved splendidly when Parkinson got dangerous, and just after the Lutonians neglected a rare opportunity when within shooting distance. In front of the visitors' goal Gray was said to be off-side, and a little while after McEwen came through grandly. An overhead shot by "Gally" from Ekins was a trifle too lofty; but it was a rattling good attempt nevertheless. "Gally" and Evans managed to get at loggerheads and the ball was thrown up, while almost immediately afterwards occurred an incident which had a great effect on the remainder of the play. Galbraith was in the act of passing to Coupar when he was charged from behind by Evans with such force as to throw him over with a crash, many fearing that the centre man must have been badly hurt. The foul taking place within the 12 yards mark the referee promptly awarded a penalty kick, much to the dismay and the dissatisfaction of the crowd. Coupar was deputed to take the kick and he succeeded in lodging the ball safely in the net, thus securing the second notch for his side. This result was loudly booted by the spectators, who were evidently under the impression that to charge a man with brute force and to spin him over like a top is correct football. The dissatisfaction which was thereby given by Mr. Crisp was apparently added to subsequently, for throughout the remainder of the game

there was a continuous fire of objurgation and the like. As time went on it was apparent that the Reading men had taken their reverses to heart, for they palpably fell off in their play. An alternative suggestion, perhaps, would be that the Lutonians were better stayers, and there may be something in that. Whatever the correct solution may be it is undeniable that the show by the homesters got worse instead of better. The "reds" pressed hotly in the meantime, and after another stoppage in order that the line might be cleared Birch scored the best goal of the day, heading through from a grand centre by Ekina. The Luton men had narrow escapes of scoring on two or three occasions, their show being admirable. Towards the close the home lot played up desperately and they had somewhat the best of matters. They failed to get the ball past Russell, however, and when the referee blew for the last time the sides stood thus:

LUTON, THREE; READING, NONE.

After the match a very discreditable scene took place. A large crowd of spectators assembled and booted the referee off the ground. So far as could be ascertained no blows were struck; but the exhibition was disgraceful, and it is likely that more will be heard of it. It is only fair to say that the authorities of the club afforded the official all the protection possible, and that the referee got away safely.